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SUBJECT: TIP CONFERENCE ENERGIZES, EDUCATES ON FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES, MEDIA, AND THE DEMAND FACTOR

REF: A) Vatican 0733; B) State 59846

SUMMARY

1.(U) Embassy Vatican organized and hosted a conference on Human Trafficking June 17 that brought together three key elements in the fight against trafficking in human beings (TIP): faith-based communities as first responders for victims; the demand factor as a causal element in TIP; and the media's role in consciousness raising. The "Call to Action" attracted nearly 200 participants, including senior Vatican and Italian government officials (including a former Italian Prime Minister), diplomats accredited to the Holy See, members of religious orders, and the media. Attendees heard U.S., Vatican and Italian speakers make innovative and forceful arguments to educate and energize those already committed to anti-trafficking initiatives, and to stimulate the uninitiated to action. Delegates viewed the department-recommended film "Lilya 4-Ever," as well as extracts from U.S. and European television network programming on the issue of trafficking. Post appreciates ECA's support for this conference, which garnered extensive media coverage helping to enhance awareness and promote action against human trafficking. End summary.

Taking Action Against Trafficking

2.(U) On June 17, Embassy organized the second of four 2004 conferences marking twenty years of full diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Holy See. Held at the prestigious Jesuit-run Pontifical Gregorian University, "A Call to Action: Joining the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons" focused on ways in which religious communities, the media, and governments could take action to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons (TIP). The conference drew a robust and enthusiastic crowd of nearly 200 senior Vatican and Italian government officials, diplomats accredited to the Holy See, and members of religious orders from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Coming on the heels of the release of the Department's 2004 TIP Report, the conference served to multiply the public outreach of this report and the Secretary's presentation two days earlier. The Ambassador highlighted the Report and the Department's priorities in his introductory comments, which emphasized the international dimensions of the problem and the need for active engagement from the Holy See and its worldwide religious communities.

Holy See Highlights Role of Faith-Based Communities

3.(U) In his keynote address, Holy See Deputy FM Pietro Parolin called for a multifaceted approach to trafficking, which he described as a grave violation of human rights and a threat to human dignity. Parolin identified poverty, discrimination and underdevelopment as root causes of the phenomenon. He praised international conventions and initiatives, but said that alone they were insufficient to tackle the problem, which he asserted would require cultural initiatives to affect attitudinal change in society. Parolin pointed out that faith-based communities were often in the front line of anti-trafficking work, describing them as "first responders." Parolin urged greater collaboration with faith-based organizations, presenting Post's current project to train women religious in anti-TIP work (ref a) as an example of a highly successful approach. He concluded with a call to the media to promote positive behaviors and offer a message that enhanced human dignity.

Faith-based Communities on Front Line

4.(U) Following Parolin's call for further collaboration

between faith-based communities and governments, German Ambassador to the Holy See Gerhard Westdickenberg moderated a session focused on the role of religious organizations in

the TIP fight. Italian nun Eugenia Bonetti (a G/TIP 2004 anti-trafficking hero) and the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Stefano Volpicelli gave a detailed presentation of a training program for nuns involved in anti-trafficking work (ref a). They made it clear that religious workers were logical participants in this work because of their vocational choice in favor of the weakest and most marginalized members of society. Moreover, their ability to engender trust among victims facilitated their engagement. Sister Bonetti gave examples of how victims viewed nuns as unbiased and independent agents, untainted by the prejudices and stereotyping that often surrounds law enforcement and other government officials.

5.(U) Mary Ellen Dougherty of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops office for Migration and Refugee Services observed that the rationale behind Catholic social policy paralleled goals of secular agencies and governments, making partnership logical and effective. Dougherty extolled the strength of faith-based initiatives to combat trafficking, noting that they were able to draw on extensive networks already in place. Faith-based communities' access to a broad range of interested groups, organizations and individuals and their genuine "staying power" - their ability to remain committed and effective even continuous funding streams -- gave them unique strengths to wage a consistent battle against trafficking, she emphasized. According to Dougherty, the Catholic Church and other religious organizations had three distinctive roles to play in the fight against trafficking: education (with the hierarchy or other religious leaders providing credibility and weight to anti-trafficking work); services to victims; and coalition building. In a day in which participants heard many troubling stories, Dougherty also emphasized the positive, pointing out the significant increase in the number of people at all levels dedicated to the fight against trafficking.

Confronting the Demand Side of TIP

6.(U) Ambassador Desire Koumba of Gabon moderated the second session on the demand side of trafficking, noting the particular interest that he and his government took in TIP. Donna Hughes, Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Rhode Island and author of a Department-sponsored TIP study, joined Dorchen Leidholdt, Executive Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, to present their hypothesis that demand, including legal prostitution, generated and exacerbated trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. Both speakers urged the adoption of legal sanctions against "exploiters" of women and cited the example of Sweden, which had effectively targeted the demand factor to fight prostitution and, consequently, trafficking, reducing the flow of trafficking into the country significantly.

7. (U) According to Leidholdt's powerful presentation, prostitution and sex trafficking are two sides of the same human rights catastrophe, whether one approaches the issue locally or globally. Both, she said, were part of a system of gender-based domination that made violence against women and girls profitable. Both preyed on women and girls made vulnerable by poverty, discrimination, and violence, leaving them traumatized, sick, and impoverished. Both, she continued, rewarded predators sexually and financially, strengthening both the demand and criminal operations that ensured the supply of victims. Leidholdt said the concerted effort by some NGOs and governments to disassociate prostitution from TIP, treating the two phenomena as distinct and unrelated, was a deliberate political strategy aimed at legitimizing the sex industry and protecting its growth and profitability. This, she insisted, would inevitably lead to more trafficking victims as demand outstripped the supply of local women already "working" in the industry.

8.(U) Hughes agreed that the demand for prostitution accounted for the profitability of sex trafficking. She argued that the link between prostitution and sex trafficking was indisputable and would not be altered if prostitution were legalized. She bolstered Leidholdt's

case by citing examples from Europe and Oceania in which demand for prostitution -- and subsequently sex trafficking to meet this demand -- increased after the decriminalization of prostitution. In response to theories that decriminalization of prostitution would help women by

bringing them out of a shadowy world into the "care" of protective legislation, Hughes contended that such legalization in fact prompted very few women to sign up for benefits or unions. Women and children in this "industry," she said, were inevitably controlled by mafias and criminals, and could not register with an authority or join a union. With most women forced into this "work" due to debt, unemployment, or poverty, they have entered a coercive and abusive world completely incompatible with the fantasy of some benevolent unionization of prostitutes. The world of prostitution, Hughes concluded, was instead much more compatible with the tactics and realities of trafficking and sexual slavery.

Media: Voice of the Voiceless

9.(U) Following the presentation of recently-broadcast excerpts on TIP from three television programs (NBC NEWS Dateline, CNN Presents, and CBS NEWS/Miami), Italian Ambassador Giuseppe Balboni Acqua took the floor and introduced CBS Chief Investigative Reporter Michele Gillen and National Public Radio's Senior European Correspondent Sylvia Poggioli. Gillen and Poggioli offered first-hand experiences of ways in which the media was currently addressing TIP, and insights into how the media could be further developed as a strategic weapon in this fight. Both stressed the need to present programming that avoided salaciousness, and noted the importance of utilizing reporting techniques that ensured victims featured in such programming were not victimized in a different way a second time by sharing their stories.

10. (U) Gillen and Poggioli said that media in source countries were often afraid to report on trafficking because of threats from organized crime or corrupt authorities profiting from it. Western media (most often in destination countries) thus had an obligation, they said, to increase the exposure of TIP stories. One attendee suggested that more programming be developed by the West for source countries that could warn potential victims by showing the reality of the "jobs" that awaited unsuspecting women and others. This could help counteract the "brainwashing" of advertisements, programming and news stories that depicted a West in which it was easy to find fortune. Poggioli said that one victim had cited to her an Italian advertisement that showed a cat eating from an expensive silver bowl. With that type of presentation broadcast to Albania and elsewhere in Europe, potential victims had come to believe that an easy life awaited them in the West.

Film Hits Hard

11.(U) Some 50 conference delegates used a "brown-bag" lunch break to view the G/TIP-recommended feature film "Lilya 4-Ever." The hard-hitting film had particular impact on the members of women's religious orders who were the majority of viewers. While time constraints prevented a formal session to analyze the movie, informal discussion between the shell-shocked viewers coming out of the film and other participants ensured that "Lilya 4-Ever" would get further attention.

Extensive Media Coverage

12.(U) Media coverage of the conference included print reports in U.S.-based Catholic and non-Catholic media, radio interviews with U.S. and Italian speakers, and television programming on Vatican-related and U.S. television networks. The media session found particular resonance with representatives from this sector, many of whom indicated in the discussion session that they were thinking of ways to expand their reporting on TIP and anti-

TIP efforts. All speakers' presentations during the conference will be made available on the Embassy Vatican website and in EUR/WE.

Comment: Momentum will Increase "Multiplier Effect"

13.(U) Since Embassy Vatican's first conference on trafficking in May 2002, the issue has become a much higher priority for the Holy See and its related agencies. The participation of Deputy Foreign Minister Parolin, the presence of Cardinal Martino who heads the Vatican Council of Justice and Peace, and enthusiastic interest of senior

representatives from a number of women's religious orders augurs well for future collaboration between faith-based communities, the U.S. Government and the Vatican. We were told during the conference that there are a million nuns around the world, all committed to the world's weakest and marginalized; in short, a powerful resource for the partnership between governments and faith-based communities to combat trafficking.

14. (U) We look to use the substantial momentum from this well-attended conference to continue expanding the Holy See's involvement in anti-TIP work at various levels. With the Vatican diplomatic corps becoming more engaged, and the vast network of Catholic religious orders, Bishops Conferences and Papal Nuncios becoming more aware of the problem, the "multiplier effect" of the Embassy's engagement has been substantial. Already we have received many positive responses and inquiries from Papal Nuncios (Holy See ambassadors) and Embassies worldwide to the initiatives noted in ref (b). Post thanks ECA its support for this conference and G/TIP for its considerable help in all of these endeavors. End comment.

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